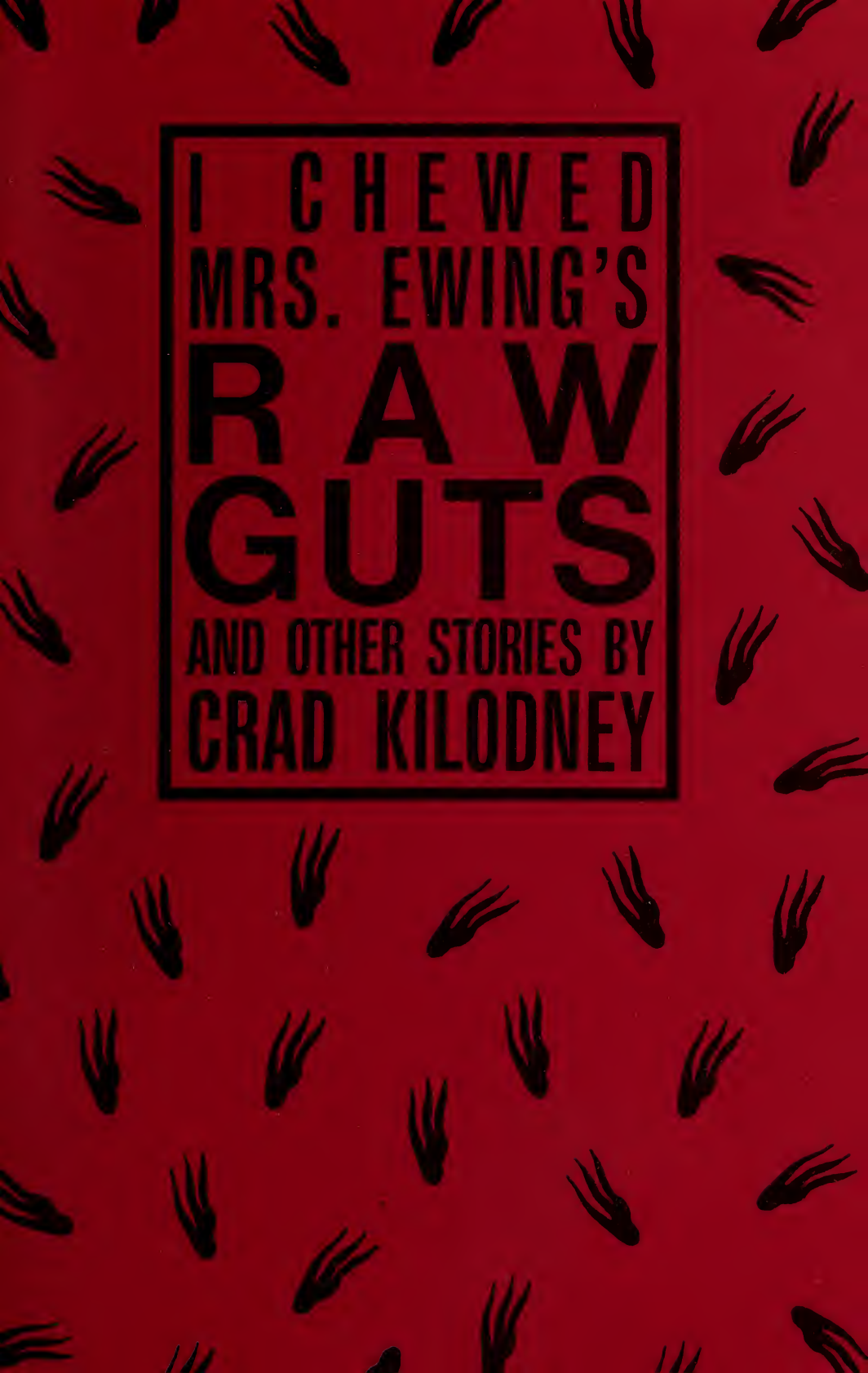
I CHEWED MRS. EWING'S RAW GUTS

AND OTHER STORIES BY

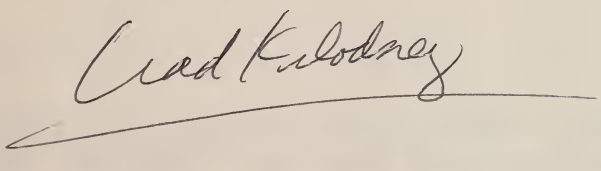
CRAD KILODNEY



I CHEWED MRS. EWING'S RAW GUTS

and Other Stories by

Crad Kilodney



CHARNEL HOUSE

Toronto, Canada

Acknowledgments:

Front cover by Arno Wolf Jr.
Poem *"Bluebirds"* by Minnie Dalton, from her book *Crumbs of Comfort* (Exposition Press, 1973)

This book was designed by the author.

COPYRIGHT © 1988 by Crad Kilodney. All rights reserved under the Universal Copyright Convention. Printed in Canada.

ISBN 0-920973-08-6

CHARNEL HOUSE is a private imprint dedicated to artistic freedom and free enterprise. It receives no government support. Correspondence is welcome and may be addressed to P.O. Box 281, Station S, Toronto, Ont. M5M 4L7. Telephone (416) 924-5670.

CONTENTS

I CHEWED MRS. EWING'S RAW GUTS 5

THE POLECAT 34

WHO IS JOHN COPPING? 49

Bluebirds are for happiness,
Nesting in the cherry tree,
Children love and watch them,
They are so happy and free.

Apple blossom petals fall
When the little bluebirds fly,
Children watch their flitting wings,
Silhouetted against the sky.

Little birds eat the cherries,
Little children are so glad
They most gladly share the fruit,
The little birds are not bad.

Bluebirds are for happiness,
They make springtime bright and gay,
The world is a better place
When the bluebirds come to stay.

-- *Minnie Dalton*

"QXN DNNPD SW WLIQXLUNDD QXKQ NZNYO CKU XKD LU XLD XNKYQ FNBLU QS FEP; JYKZLUBD WSY WSEI AINKDEYND QYSEFIN QXN KEDQNYNDQ KUP LU QXN FYKLU SW YNDANJQKFIN WSIVD JYLCLUKI PNDLYND DAYLUB EA."

-- XEODCKUD

I CHEWED MRS. EWING'S RAW GUTS

There comes a moment in the life of every sensitive, civilized, thinking individual when he is filled with rage at the realization that he is completely at the mercy of ignorant, malicious monsters. How then should he deal with his adversaries? Should he capitulate to them to avoid trouble? Should he attempt to reason with them? Or should he confront them directly and, throwing all gentility aside, resort to such traditional forms of retribution as murder, disembowelment, and cannibalism to relieve his psychological needs and establish Justice? I hope to convince the reader by my own example that the latter course is not only possible but necessary.

While ours may be an age that requires goodness, it is regrettably an age that respects violence more. Even the meek bank clerk sitting at his desk harbors the vilest criminal thoughts -- thoughts which he does not dare act upon. If such thoughts could be made into deeds instantaneously, our gleaming cities would run red with blood overnight. But it is not indiscriminate violence I speak of; it is the selective act of purification that expunges the pain of injustice from the soul of the oppressed. I am sure that many a meek individual will derive vicarious relief from the story I am about to unfold.

In literature it is customary for the author to disclaim any similarity in his work to real persons or events and thereby don the mantle of Fiction. I consider such a sham to be both stylistically unnecessary and philosophically insincere. The canny reader is not so easily fooled, for Truth has an unmistakable ring, even when that ring is muffled by the fog that arises from the swamp or is all but swept away by the gale of the north wind, and at every moment the reader's soul is stirred by familiar passions -- blood lust, rage, and revenge. And so, dear reader, glance around you and notice the poor fools immersed in their best-sellers, their vacuous novels, their inane magazines, their witless newspapers -- all manner of pathetic imitations of reality -- and know that at this moment, praise the old gods, the door has been opened unto you and that you are among the

select few privileged to read the truth.

This grim, if not tragic, chronicle begins in the spring of 1985, when I was forced to seek new accommodations because of circumstances entirely unprejudicial to myself. This in itself is a familiar difficulty to many of you, for our delightful city is the most expensive in Canada. But for a poor writer of limited means the difficulty is multiplied by a factor of two, or even three or four. For ten years I had enjoyed unusually cheap accommodations on Haddington Avenue in a basement that was large, if plain, and sufficiently private to suit me. My landlords were genial people who were not greedy and always spoke to me in a friendly manner. Naturally, I thought that Fate had dealt me a cruel blow by forcing me out into the real world of mercenary landlords and high rents. Where would I live?

I placed an ad in the Toronto *Star* -- *"poor, struggling author seeks cheap apartment,"* that sort of thing -- and before long Fate appeared to have solved my problem: a Mrs. Ewing, living nearby, called to say she had a partly furnished basement on Old Orchard Grove, and I was welcome to look at it.

Here is (or was) Mrs. Ewing: a tall, broad-shouldered woman in her late 70's, not at all frail, very wrinkled, white hair, thick glasses (legally blind), cigarette smoker, and with a mercurial expression indicative of a short temper.

My introduction to Mrs. Ewing was entirely satisfactory. She liked me and was impressed by the book I showed her. The basement apartment had both its good and bad points. But the principal thing was that she was offering it to me at the same rent I was paying on Haddington Avenue. And being in the same neighborhood, I still had my post office box and bank nearby. Yet something deep down in my mind stirred uneasily. Was Mrs. Ewing the benign, kindly creature she appeared to be? What worried me was that she had never had a tenant before. If there was a mine field beneath this peaceful beach, that's where it lay.

"Don't move your things until after sundown," she cautioned me.

"Oh? Why?" I asked.

"I just prefer it that way," she said firmly.

And so my landlord and I moved my belongings in three carloads on consecutive evenings during the July 1st weekend.

Then the movers came to cart over the few items of old, worn-out furniture my landlord gladly allowed me to take away to supplement the minimal furnishings on Old Orchard Grove.

"What do you need all this furniture for?" complained Mrs. Ewing. "I thought you had just a few books and some clothing." This from a widowed lady with a basement full of unbelievable junk, not the least of which was a Paleozoic, if not Pre-Cambrian, radio taking up a large part of the bookshelf in my bedsitting room. My plea that she find another place for this dead object was complied with only very grudgingly. I was already on the defensive, and I was to remain on the defensive until...until I took matters into my own hands by a force of will that was at least Neitzschean and very possibly Hitlerian.

We had previously agreed that my car would be parked in the driveway. Mrs. Ewing had no car, being unable to drive any longer. The garage was rented to a man who kept a small trailer, which he needed access to infrequently. Upon learning that a tenant would have a car in the driveway, the man objected, and Mrs. Ewing suddenly couldn't bear the thought of my car in the driveway. "I hate change," she said, a refrain I was to hear many times. She wanted me to park my car at the corner gas station. I tried to reassure her that I would move it whenever the garage tenant needed to come and go and reminded her that she had already agreed to let me park in the driveway. Fortunately, the problem was solved when the garage tenant took his trailer away to store it elsewhere. "Would you rent the garage for an extra twenty dollars a month?" she asked me. I agreed.

A tenant's space is his own. Any decent landlord recognizes this fact. But when I removed Mrs. Ewing's mawkish pictures from the walls (there was one of an old man praying before a lighted candle that would have looked bad even at a flea market) to make room for my own, she objected. "Who told you to take my pictures down?" she said, a rhetorical phrasing that suggested an unbalanced mind. And, "Maybe *I* don't like *your* taste in art!"

I shall pause now to describe the apartment I was renting. It was in a bungalow and therefore had a ceiling exactly two inches over my head. Two-thirds of the basement was mine. I entered down a short flight of stairs into my kitchen. To the left of the stairs was my bedsitting room,

with a door with no lock. The kitchen was large but not very convenient. There was no sink. I had to use the laundry room sink to do my dishes. My toilet and washroom sink were in a small cubicle off the kitchen with a collapsing partition. There was no shower or tub, so I was obliged to use Mrs. Ewing's bathroom to shower, a circumstance that was to lead to much trouble because Mrs. Ewing "hated change." (I was later to boycott her shower for nearly a year as an act of protest against her neurotic bitching and general rudeness, about which more later.) Beyond my kitchen was the other third of the basement -- Mrs. Ewing's laundry and storage areas, along with the oil burner, fuel tank, etc.

You are perhaps already wondering why such a person as Mrs. Ewing would invite a tenant to occupy her basement if she was so resistant to change. The answer is that a friend of hers thought she ought to have someone else in the house for the sake of her safety and for a little company, and it was this friend who had seen my ad and urged Mrs. Ewing to call me.

I had not been in the basement more than a couple of weeks when there was a severe downpour in the morning, which I slept through, not realizing that water was splashing in through one of my windows onto the carpet. I awoke to find the carpet soaked. So I sacrificed an entire day's business to stay home and nurse that carpet dry with my electric heater so it would not be spoiled. What was Mrs. Ewing's reaction? She was very annoyed. Later she was to say that she "should have put me out" after I let her carpet get wet. *Put me out over an accident!* But when she herself was to go out one evening and leave the water running in her kitchen sink so that it spilled onto the floor, down through my ceiling, and into my washroom cubicle, that, of course, was of no consequence. "Just a few drops," in her own words.

But in general, and out of respect for the truth, I must say that for the first couple of months under her roof, I got along well with Mrs. Ewing. I did small errands for her, and she rewarded me with an occasional meal or treat. When she was cross, she later excused herself, saying that she had merely taken out her bad moods on me. I was always greatly relieved at these little reconciliations, but deep down I continued to feel defensive and insecure, for I didn't know from one day to the next whether I would have to deal with Jekyll or Hyde. Consequently, I avoided her as

much as possible. I worried about when to go up and take my shower and how to be done with it as soon as possible and get downstairs again.

The first "big incident" came about owing to the visit of Mrs. Ewing's grandniece Linda. Linda was staying in the house for a few days in September. One evening I bumped into her in the laundromat and remarked innocently, "Your Aunt Kay is quite sturdy for a lady of sixty-nine."

"Sixty-nine? Oh, no, Kay is seventy-seven."

"Seventy-seven? She told me she was sixty-nine."

"No, she's seventy-seven."

"Are you sure?"

"Positive."

"Hmm. Oh, well, you know what they say: a lady is entitled to lie about her age."

The next morning I was in my kitchen having my breakfast when Mrs. Ewing came down to do her ironing. She seemed in a testy mood, perhaps because she didn't think too much of Linda. It was bad judgment on my part -- but no malice intended -- when I thought to get an embarrassed laugh out of her by saying, "It seems you fibbed about your age." Reader, the look that transformed the face of that supposedly benign old woman was worthy of Norman Bates or Captain Bligh. I elaborated, saying that Linda had said so. Mrs. Ewing glared at me through her thick glasses. What right had I to talk about her age behind her back! Whom did I believe, her or Linda? Was she obliged to show me her birth certificate? And so on. I desperately tried to soothe her ruffled feelings, but to no avail. Suddenly I was being told that I should look for another place to live because the basement was very cold in the winter and Mrs. Ewing had no intention of seeing her hydro bills go through the roof because of my electric heater. I realized then that I was dealing with a lunatic. Ordinarily, if a person unintentionally slights you and then makes every effort to apologize, you accept the apology, realizing no insult was intended. I was only to learn much later, however, through a bit of detective work that Linda had told the truth and it was Mrs. Ewing who had lied and was now making a scene about it! She was indeed seventy-seven, a fact I deduced before she herself admitted it!

It took a lot of soft words to smooth this one over, but I managed it somehow. The thought of having to move again

was too dreadful to contemplate. I had books to sell and books to write. I was no gadabout. This move had been my first in ten years, and I didn't care to move any more frequently than that.

My troubles were far from over. One day I again had to sit in the kitchen while Mrs. Ewing ironed clothes. (I was rapidly developing a complex about coming out of my room at all as long as she was down in the basement.) "I was just visiting Mrs. So-and-so," she said, a hard edge in her voice. "Do you know her husband has had seventeen heart attacks and he's still alive? And *my* husband died from the very first heart attack he had!" What do you say to a comment like that, right? I said nothing. But my silence did me no good, for Mrs. Ewing was obviously in one of her moods. Within the space of five minutes she was nagging me about several unrelated things. "What do you need all these boxes for anyway?" she complained. "They're in my way." (My boxes were stowed in the space she herself had designated.) "And I don't like the way you throw your plastic bags in the closet. It's a fire hazard." A fire hazard! Can you believe it? Plastic bags in a closet, nowhere near any wiring or flammable liquids. "This basement smells like a barn," she went on. "I want you to open the window and air it out for a few minutes in the morning." I agreed to do it, although she was out of place to nag me. The reason why I kept the windows closed was because the heating in the basement was almost non-existent. Imagine living in a basement with one very inefficient hot-water radiator and *no storm windows*. I even had to improvise some insulation with cardboard and plastic food wrap.

As the weather got colder I was forced to use my electric heater. Without it the inside temperature would fall to 64 degrees F. overnight, and that was in the bedsitting room, which had the radiator. (You don't even want to know what my washroom was like.) After the first really cold night I had ice on the *inside* of my windows. One day Mrs. Ewing complained, "Do you run that heater all night long?" (I didn't.) "Do you know I got a $150 hydro bill this month!" (Impossible. I knew what the electric consumption in the house was because I read the meter every month.) "I can't allow this!"

"Why would you ask if my heater was on all night?"

"I came down at seven o'clock this morning, and I could

see it through the crack in your door." Wonderful. Now I was dealing with a landlady who felt entitled to look through the crack in the door of her tenant's bedroom!

I should take a moment to mention that Mrs. Ewing was a faithful, observant Catholic who went to church every Sunday and even baked apple pies for church functions.

As winter came on, the snow filled the driveway. Since I was the one with the car, I took it upon myself to shovel the driveway, but it was also a consideration towards Mrs. Ewing, who at her age should not have had to shovel snow. I thought of my own grandmother and what I hoped her tenants were doing for her, and I allowed that to dictate the way I would treat Mrs. Ewing. Nevertheless, dear reader, imagine my shock when, after I had shoveled the driveway for the first time, Mrs. Ewing not only didn't thank me but criticized me for not doing it well enough!

Two weeks later it snowed again. This time I was in no hurry to shovel the driveway. When I went out to go to the corner store, there was my landlady shoveling away. She snarled at me, "Thanks for not helping me!"

"Do you want to know why I'm not helping you? Because when I shoveled the driveway last time, not only did you not thank me, but you nagged me for not doing it well enough to suit you!"

"Oh, that's just terrible, isn't it!" she replied sarcastically. "Come February you'll be looking for a new place to live!"

I resumed shoveling the driveway.

Then there was the problem regarding the shower. For months I had taken my evening showers and was not aware of any problem. Then Mrs. Ewing started to nag me about all the steam in the bathroom and the dampness on the walls. "Do you take boiling hot showers with water going all over the place?" she asked, fluttering her arms for emphasis. (Can you believe this?)

"Mrs. Ewing," I tried to explain patiently, "when a person takes a shower, there is inevitably steam in the air because the air is saturated with water vapor."

"Not when I take my bath. Why don't you wipe down the tiles?"

"I do wipe down the tiles. But the bathroom still needs a few minutes to dry out because you have no exhaust fan."

"I suppose it's too much of an effort for you," she said.

Thereafter, I tried extra hard to wipe down the tiles and walls. But this was not good enough. Mrs. Ewing wanted me to wipe everything, including her toilet tank. I said I didn't think that was appropriate. I reduced the duration of my shower to less than two minutes. Nevertheless, she contended that the paint in the bathroom was being ruined and blamed me for it.

The following spring, Mrs. Ewing decided to have the bathroom repainted. "The painter said it was your hot showers doing it, but I've decided to let it go this time. But you'll have to be careful from now on," she said.

The bathroom had turned into a battleground. I had been keeping a few bath articles in one corner of her cupboard, with her permission. Yet, mysteriously, after the bathroom was repainted, she decided there was *no room* in her cupboard for my deodorant, powder, and soap dish. I was instructed to carry all my items up and down, including my towel, and to leave nothing of mine in her bathroom. I caved in and didn't argue. The woman was, after all, out of her mind.

I had so far done the following favors for Mrs. Ewing: shoveled her driveway during the entire winter, gotten up on a stool and changed a light bulb, fixed her TV or converter several times, gone to the store for her, given her three rides in my car, adjusted the water pressure in her oil burner daily, toted her garbage to the curb routinely, washed her bathtub while she was out of town without being asked, fixed an air leak in her storm door, read some of her bills for her, read the hydro meter for her, and loaned her money for the weekend when she had missed the bank one Friday afternoon. And as for the rent, I always paid it diligently. Yet, after all this, Mrs. Ewing made the following sarcastic remark to me after I was exiting her bathroom: "Gee, aren't I lucky to have such a cooperative tenant!" She said this because I was impatient about having to wipe down her walls a second time at her insistence and then stand there while she inspected the job. And I looked into her wrinkled face and said not a word or reply but merely thought, *You piece of shit. You utter scum of a person.* And I vowed then that I would never do another favor for her, never speak to her, and, what's more, that I would take sponge baths downstairs

at my washroom sink and boycott her shower.

By the following summer I had reduced contact with my landlady so much that an entire week could go by without my seeing her. If she said good morning, I would reply. If she asked me a question, I would reply. But that was all. If she was downstairs in the basement, I would stay in my room until she went back up. This was hell for me, but I refused to be friendly until she apologized for her rudeness. Of course, no apology came, for by now she was convinced that I was "taking advantage of her" because she was a widow and had no man in the house. At one point, much later, after I had avoided her successfully for three weeks, she said, "What're you being so nasty for?"

"I don't know what you mean," I replied calmly.

"You know very well what I mean! Listen, I don't have to take this monkey business from you!"

When I returned from my summer vacation in August of 1986, I found that one of my electric cords -- the one powering my little bedside clock -- had been unplugged. I also found the on-off switch of my TV in the "on" position. (I had previously unplugged both the TV and the converter.) I thought, *This woman comes into my room and touches things!* This suspicion was reinforced a few more times during the next few months. I would notice something moved from its normal position. (When you've lived alone as long as I have, you become somewhat obsessive about where things normally are.) Nothing was ever taken or damaged, and I can't say that I was inconvenienced, but I didn't like the idea of my space being violated. I have always placed a high priority on my privacy, but Mrs. Ewing could never get it through her thick head that a tenant's space is his own and the landlady cannot come into it at her pleasure.

By December of 1986 these intrusions were causing me to lose sleep. I had so far resisted the urge to question Mrs. Ewing about them because I was not 100% sure that I hadn't been mistaken. I needed tangible proof. So I began setting a trap each day before leaving the house. I taped a thread across the top of the door and door frame, which she would never notice because of her bad eyesight. When I returned each evening, I would check the thread and make a note in my diary. If one end of the thread was detached, this was physical proof that the door had been opened. In the month of December I recorded no less than five such door openings. I

still didn't know why she was doing this. Perhaps it was a neurotic habit. Perhaps she wasn't even aware of doing it.

On Monday the 22nd, three days before Christmas, I bumped into Mrs. Ewing on my way out and stopped to say, politely but firmly, "Oh, by the way, there's no need for you to go into my room when I'm out of the house."

"YOU'RE A DIRTY LIAR!" she screamed. "YOU COMPLAIN TOO MUCH! I WANT YOU OUT OF HERE!"

When I returned that evening, I found a hand-written note on my kitchen table: *"You will vacate the premises Feb. 1st or earlier if possible -- but not later than Feb. 1st. K. Ewing."* Period. No reason given. Mrs. Ewing had never heard of the Landlord And Tenant Act, which protects tenants from just this sort of bullying. She herself "hated change" but didn't mind inflicting change on her tenant in the form of a totally illegal eviction note three days before Christmas. Is it not wonderful to reflect upon the Christian spirit of our society, exemplified by a hypocritical old woman who will go to church on Sunday and sing hymns and then seek to disrupt the private life of a tenant rather than admit she has been doing something she shouldn't have been doing? I should write to the parish priest at St. Margaret's and congratulate him on the fine job he is doing instilling the proper moral instincts in his congregation.

I went up and knocked on Mrs. Ewing's door. She opened it an inch and peeked out at me. "I just want to ask you one question," I said. "Are you insisting you have not gone into my room?"

"I DON'T HAVE TO TAKE THE THIRD DEGREE FROM YOU!" she shouted, slamming the door in my face.

If I'd had the money and the time to look for a new apartment, I would have done so. But the fact was that I could not afford to pay the going rents for Toronto apartments. And I had also planned to devote January and February to important writing, including the preparation of a manuscript for submission to the Ontario Arts Council. But beyond that, my sense of justice was stronger than any sense of pragmatism: as a matter of principle I was not going to let myself be bullied out of my apartment by a hostile and possibly senile bitch. If she wanted war, she would get it. I intended to stay put and get my work done. The law was on my side.

However, I paid a high price for my obstinacy. I am

not an aggressive person by nature. Confrontation of any sort is uncomfortable for me. When an occasion arises on which I choose to be tough and assertive, part of my mind argues that this is a positive experience that will strengthen me, but the other part of my mind argues that I am acting out of character and will only feel foolish for it. Because of the conditions that beset me, I became extremely nervous and began to drink habitually to calm my nerves. I went to the doctor twice for tranquilizers and fretted over how long I could make the supply last. My doctor gave me this advice: "You must move out. It is not good for you to stay there. You are a writer. You must have your mind free to create. You must find somewhere else to live." His advice was echoed by all those to whom I confided my problem. Everyone told me I should move. No one counseled me to fight my landlady legally, although they understood my outrage.

At times I felt close to a breakdown or an overt act of violence. I talked and cursed to myself, imagining some of the most horrible acts that could be committed against another person, never realizing, of course, that I was to eventually commit an act of an even grosser nature than I had so far imagined!

I thought I would buy time indefinitely and perhaps not have to move at all. Perhaps Mrs. Ewing would change her mind. In the meantime, I collected information about the law because it seemed likely that at some point we would end up in court. I also placed my tape recorder by my door so that I could record anything my landlady said to me.

The month of January was passing with nary a word from the Old Bat, as I was now wont to think of her. I thought that one of two things would happen when the 31st rolled around: either she would say nothing and allow me to stay, or there would be a terrible scene.

On Friday the 30th, she knocked on my door. "Are you getting ready to move out?"

"No, I'm not," I answered nervously.

"Why not?"

"I can't afford it, and I have work to do besides."

"You've got a hell of a nerve. Typical American. You came up here because you couldn't earn a living in your own country, and now you get money from the government so you can stay up all night watching TV and sleep all day. You're

a bum. You're not a man. When I was your age I earned a good living. Thirty-eight years old and can't even write a book. Can't even support yourself. And you won't do anythink for me. The lady down the block gets $350 a month from her tenant and he even does chores for her. But you won't do anything because you're a lazy bum. If I'd have known I could get stuck with such a bad tenant I never would have let you come in. But you take advantage of me because I'm an old woman. If my husband were alive, you wouldn't have lasted two weeks in this house...."

This was the sort of excrement I had to swallow from this despicable creature, this senile bag of poison. I told her flatly that her "eviction notice" was illegal and that I refused to be put out. "That may be the law in the States, but you're in Canada now, living off Canadian money!" she ranted. "Now, I'm going to give you another month because you obviously can't get out by tomorrow, but so help me, you're going to leave if I have to burn the house down to get rid of you! I'll put all your things out on the road! My brother's a lawyer! He'll get you out!" And she went upstairs. I had recorded the entire conversation.

I poured myself a large glass of sherry to calm down, for I was shaking badly. I called my girlfriend (now ex-girlfriend) and told her what had happened. She was not entirely sympathetic. Toronto was full of places to live, according to her. She had moved so many times in her life (though not in the last five years) that she dismissed my problem as a triviality. My conflict with Mrs. Ewing was to contribute to our eventual break-up because she didn't want to hear my continual complaints about my landlady.

The next day the Old Bat left another "eviction note": *"This is your notice to vacate March 31/87. This is your second notice -- the first was presented to you Dec. 22/86. Kay Ewing."* When I went up to pay the rent for February, she said with some embarrassment that she had meant to say in the note "March 1st," not "March 31st." She had inadvertently given me an extra month.

February passed quietly without incident. I worked diligently on my writing projects but was under continual duress. By the middle of March I was through with my indoor work and was ready to get back to the street. My efforts to find a cheap apartment by placing ads in the *Star* again had proved fruitless. I was apparently already occupying the

last cheap place in the city, and anywhere I went I was looking at literally double the rent. I kept hoping the Old Bat would fall down the stairs and die, solving my problem, but no such luck.

One Sunday when I thought she might be in a good mood -- or at least not a hostile one -- I went out to talk to her by the garage. I told her that I was making an effort to find a place but could not guarantee to be out by the end of the month. "I don't care whether you stay or not. You don't bother me," she said. And then she went on: "It's really all your fault. None of this would've happened if you hadn't accused me of going into your room. What's in your room that interests me? Nothing! Why would I go into your room?"

"I don't know. Maybe you did it unconsciously. Maybe you have a problem with your memory. After all, you couldn't recall disconnecting my clock or touching my TV."

"There's nothing wrong with my memory! I have all my faculties! And I never touched your clock or your TV!"

And then I told her about the thread over the door. She paused in what she was doing and looked at me severely. "You're a sneaky bugger, you are. Only a sneaky bugger like you would do such a thing. What a lot of nerve. Maybe I went in just once to bleed your radiator. It would never occur to *you* to do it. And besides, it's my house. Even in an expensive apartment building the landlord would have the key to your apartment." Then she cleverly changed the subject. "Do you know I could get $350 a month for that basement? And have a good tenant besides. One who would do things for me. But you don't do anything for me. I could be lying dead upstairs and you'd never know."

"If Jesus Christ were your tenant you'd complain about him, too!"

"THAT DOES IT! YOU'RE GETTING OUT THE END OF THE MONTH!" It was such a nice, sunny Sunday, and she had been to church practising Christianity.

My confidants were all of one mind: "You can't deal with someone like her. She's not right in her head. It's not worth the hassle. You don't really *want* to stay there, do you?" No, I didn't. I thought that with a reasonable effort I ought to find somewhere to live by the end of March. But the cost of apartments!

I gave up my old car to save the cost of insurance and

the extra $20 a month for the garage. The Old Bat complained, "You didn't give me enough notice that you were giving up the garage! You owe me another twenty dollars!"

On Monday, March 30th, I found a note on my kitchen table: *"Hydro, water & oil are up considerably since Jan. 1. In view of this fact your rent will now increase 5.2%. K.E."* A rent increase on two days' notice! I decided not to comply as a matter of principle, even though only a small amount of money was involved. I typed out a letter to Mrs. Ewing telling her that she would not get the increase, nor would she get any favors or consideration of any sort from me until she stopped treating me abusively. I intended to hand her the letter the next day.

The next day it snowed. I didn't shovel the driveway. I went out on an errand and came back, tracking snow onto the basement stairs. Mrs. Ewing shouted at me from the top of the stairs, "I WANT EVERY DROP OF THAT SNOW CLEANED UP!"

"Don't talk to me like that!" I answered her. And then I tried to hand her the letter. She wouldn't take it. She was afraid. So I went into my room and took my coat off. She followed me downstairs. "You're not getting your rent increase," I told her.

"You're cheap, cheap, cheap, that's what you are! That rent increase is legal! My friend across the street told me so! Now listen, I've had enough of your abuse!"

"*My* abuse? You're sick in the head, Mrs. Ewing! You're senile!"

"Don't you say that to me, you bastard! You stupid bugger! You bum! Well, you're not going to have much privacy down here, believe you me! I'm going to be down here quite a lot from now on! You think you can get away with this because there's no man in the house!..." I had my tape recorder running.

"You see this? I'm recording what you say."

"That won't stand up in court! My brother's a lawyer! He can have you out of here so fast it'll make your head spin! I can get rid of you for health reasons! You cheap bugger! I'll burn this house down! I do you a favor by letting you have this place for so little, and look what I get! I figure, 'He's got no money, he's so poor.' And you take advantage of me!"

"I'll be seeing you in court!"

"WE'RE NOT GOING TO ANY COURT! YOU'RE JUST GOING TO

GET OUT! I DON'T WANT YOU HERE! I WANT YOU OUT!" And she stepped closer, her wrinkled bag of a face contorted into a look of pure hatred and insanity. "YOU STUPID BUGGER! A BUM THAT STANDS ON THE STREET TRYING TO GET MONEY OUT OF PEOPLE! YOU DIRTY BASTARD! BUM! BUM!" And she raised her fist and punched me twice on the cheek. Not hard, but the woman was obviously out of control. I grabbed her wrist to stop her. "OW! LET GO OF ME! I'LL HAVE BRUISES! YOU'LL PAY FOR THIS!"

"You'll never get me out of here!" I said defiantly, and I meant it. This was war. And if it was an impractical war, so be it! I could not allow my reputation to be tarnished by being forced out of an apartment.

Reader, I know what you're thinking: *Is all this unpleasantness worth it? Why doesn't he just move out and to hell with the cost? One's sanity is worth more than a cheap apartment.* And so it is, friend, but you must live in the skin of a true fanatic (a *moralist* one of my readers called me) to feel the pulsing of irrational energies, to see the world as a battleground for honor, to look at one's face in the mirror and think, *I am committed to my principle whatever the cost to me. I cannot let THEM defeat me!* This is what had kept me on the street for more than eight years, against all reason, freezing my ass in the winter, taking all manner of abuse, *because I had to have a literary career!* And this is what would keep me on the street until my legs gave out and my face turned craggy with age. Reader, is there not a certain rationale inherent in my actions that is based on the premise that the writer must set himself apart, must resist the forces that for other people make life a hell of endless compromise? Or perhaps it was just the sense of failure that had dogged me all my life, a sense of injury that would not permit another defeat or injustice.

I sat down and drafted a statement of complaint to be delivered to the Justice of the Peace. I intended to lay a charge of harassment under the Landlord And Tenant Act.*

In the early evening I made ready to go downtown to attend a literary function. It was about 6:15. Mrs. Ewing came downstairs looking disoriented and said, "I've been

**Sec. 121(4)(b): A landlord shall not substantially interfere with the reasonable enjoyment of the premises by a tenant with intent to cause the tenant to give up possession of the premises.*

feeling so strange all day." I replied calmly that that was understandable considering the awful scene that had occurred that afternoon. "What do you mean?" she asked in total sincerity. "What happened?"

"Well...our argument....You know."

"What argument? Did we have an argument? I don't even remember being down here."

I was stunned. "Do you not remember having an argument with me today?"

"No, I don't. I don't even know what I did all day. I don't know whether I've been out or anything else."

I could tell instinctively she was telling the truth. She had had a loss of memory (a temporary one, because later she had a partial recollection of this incident). When I told her all that had happened, she couldn't believe it. She thought I was making it up. I told her I had it all on my tape recorder. She asked me to play it. I declined because it would've been too embarrassing for her and too upsetting for me.

"What did we argue about?" she asked.

"Among other things, your notice of a rent increase."

"What notice?"

"The notice you left on my kitchen table yesterday morning."

"I don't recall being down here yesterday. Have you got the notice?" I said I did, and I showed it to her. It was in her own handwriting. She couldn't recognize the note as her own -- she even claimed she had no stationery like that -- although she had to admit it was her handwriting. "Now you've got me real scared," she said. "Maybe I've had a stroke, but I don't think so." We agreed that she did not have the right symptoms for a stroke.

I hesitated to say it, but I was convinced she was suffering from some sort of senility. I had read about it in a medical book, and the signs all pointed to that. I said to her in as kindly a way as I could, "Mrs. Ewing, I think it's time another member of the family were brought in on this."

"What for?"

"Well....I just think it would be a big help."

"They have their own problems. I don't want to involve them."

"Then I think you should see your doctor."

After she went back upstairs I didn't know whether to regard this as a good or bad development. But I still intended to go to the Justice of the Peace, if only to force the matter upon the attention of the family.

I went out and returned about 11 p.m. I called my girlfriend and told her what had happened and what I intended to do. She was furious. The old woman was sick, and I had to show compassion, she said. It was my moral duty as a writer. And I was stupid to contest a lousy 5.2% rent increase. I should just pay it, legal or illegal. And going to the J.P. was wrong, too. I should write to a member of the family.

My girlfriend's criticism really jolted me. I wrote out the April rent cheque, including the increase. I went up and knocked on Mrs. Ewing's door. I gave her the cheque and reassured her that everything was going to be all right. There was another lady in the kitchen, a neighbor. She gave me a harsh look and said, "You've upset Mrs. Ewing very much. She's going to the doctor tomorrow."

I was somewhat irked by her tone and replied, "You haven't heard both sides of the story."

"Mrs. Ewing can't talk now. She's tired."

I again reassured my landlady and went back downstairs.

I did a lot of hard thinking that night. I'd been so sure of myself in vowing to take a hard line, and now I felt I'd been completely wrong. Obviously, I should be kind to the woman. Yes, I would even buy a bunch of flowers and leave them in her kitchen to find upon her return from the doctor.

So the next day I bought a nice bunch of roses and put them in a glass vase in her kitchen. I thought, *In case her doctor has some bad news for her, she'll feel somewhat cheered up. She'll know her tenant is not against her.*

For several days I heard nothing from Mrs. Ewing, although I could hear her upstairs following her usual routine. I had expected at least a thank you for the flowers.

I began to consider various scenarios regarding my domestic situation. Nothing was clear any more. I had no idea how things were likely to unfold.

I was now back on the street doing business, trying to get back into my routine. I had run out of tranqs and was now relying on alcohol for sleep.

A few days after Mrs. Ewing's temporary lapse of memory, it snowed. I shoveled the driveway for her.

On Monday, April 6th, Mrs. Ewing came down to do her laundry. When I asked how she was, I found her back to her old hostile self. "The doctor told me you were making me sick!" she said. "And what were those flowers for, and why did you shovel the driveway? You never did a thing for me since you moved in here! I guess it's because you know you bruised me on the arms!"

"What!" I said, aghast.

"Just look at these marks on both my arms! You bruised me!"

I couldn't see a thing and told her so.

"Well, there were bruises there and you must have done it because I didn't have them before!"

I went into my room and closed the door. I was outraged. I had not only been the target of a long pattern of abusive behavior, but I was now being insulted after a gesture of kindness! How I wished I could've strangled that hideous old woman and gotten away with it! Instead, I decided to take another approach. I wrote a long letter to the Old Bat's nephew. I had met her nephew a long time before, and I believed he had a good impression of me. So I laid out the whole case history for him and urged him to get involved for the sake of his aunt's health.

I waited for a reply. I got none. I concluded that he didn't believe anything in my letter. My girlfriend had another opinion: he believed it but didn't care to do anything because he probably didn't like his aunt very much.

During the month of April I don't think I got one good night's sleep. My nerves were shot. (One afternoon I was so distracted thinking about my domestic problem that I forgot to board the subway when it arrived.) I had almost no contact with the Old Bat, but alone in my room I would mutter to myself while flinging my fists through the air or choking an imaginary throat in front of me. My mental state was in no way improving.

Reader, do you doubt that the Cosmos operates according to arcane laws? Certain days are so weird that you know something other than mere coincidence is at work. Some minor god with a sense of humor as warped as my own concocted Monday, April 27th, this way: in the morning I go to the bank to buy a Metro Pass and become very impatient waiting for a garrulous teller to finish a conversation with another customer. Then I go to the postal substation in the drug

store and am again made to wait by the clerk, who is conversing with a customer ahead of me. On my way back to my apartment I see a truck *turned over on its side*. A block after that I see a driver with an ugly, deformed jaw attempting to make an awkward illegal turn. When I go downtown to sell books I discover that a large part of the business district has been blacked out by a fire causing a power failure. I go back up to Bloor St. and make all of three sales in two hours before it starts to rain. I pack up and go home. When I arrive home I find a formal notice of eviction tacked to my door -- a standard notice that the Old Bat has gotten filled out for her by The Advocacy Centre For The Elderly. The notice demands that I vacate the premises by July 1st. The reasons given are that Mrs. Ewing requires my present space for her own use (?) and that I have substantially interfered with her enjoyment of her premises! The second reason is detailed as follows: that I have harassed her by making derogatory comments about her age and her religion and by treating her as though she were incompetent to manage her own affairs!

Reader, some lies have a fouler stench than others, but no lie stinks worse than one that has been set down in legal language by a lawyer.

The next day I went to the J.P. with the complaint I'd originally drafted four weeks before. He sympathized with me but said the court would not respect a complaint that I had waited four weeks to file. His practical advice was to just move. "Even if you beat her in court, what have you won? You've won the right to stay someplace where you're unhappy."

I called my former landlord on Haddington Avenue to see if there was any chance of my moving back. His original renovation plans had been deferred indefinitely, but we had an understanding that if he did renovate, I'd be invited back at a reasonable rent. Unfortunately, he informed me that all his plans were still on hold, so that option was out.

Two letters arrived in the mail from The Advocacy Centre For The Elderly, along with a letter for me to sign agreeing to give up the apartment as of July 1st. I refused to sign, saying only that I was trying to make arrangements for myself.

With a two-month reprieve, I decided to do business all of May and then hunt for an apartment in June. After the

first week of June I was so demoralized I went back to the street to do business.

Toward the end of June I realized I was running out of time. What's more, it would soon be time to get new books into production -- a major task requiring my undivided attention. I couldn't go ahead until the apartment problem was solved. I'd never be able to write with a clear head if I remained under Mrs. Ewing's roof. This circumstance, along with the break-up of my relationship, plunged me into a terrible depression. (I cannot tell you, reader, what almost happened to me.) Seeing no prospect for happiness in Toronto, I decided to go into exile -- to Hamilton, of all places. I got up early one morning and went to Hamilton, chequebook in hand, with the intention of finding an apartment. After spending the whole afternoon walking all over that desolate city, I realized Hamilton would be suicide for me. I came back to Toronto.

July 1st passed, and I knew that any time before the end of the month The Advocacy Centre For Kindly Old Catholics Abused By Cruel Tenants was likely to apply to the court for a writ of possession.

I searched diligently for an apartment. On the 7th I found one. It was literally double the rent I was currently paying and about half the size of my basement, but by Toronto standards it was reasonable. I paid a deposit and arranged to move a week later. I'd already paid Mrs. Ewing the rent for July but decided to let her keep the whole month's rent.

In the midst of one of the worst summer heat waves Toronto had ever seen, I moved a little at a time, two suitcases at a time by bus and subway, and with two trips by car with a friend. On the final day a small mover came for my few pieces of furniture. As I carried the last item out of the basement, Mrs. Ewing appeared at the side door. "What about that light switch you broke!" she demanded.

"I DIDN'T BREAK IT!" I shouted back at her.

My misery should have been over with my settling into my new apartment downtown, and for some time I was too occupied with routine domestic matters to dwell on all the unpleasantness I'd been through. Then I worked for several weeks on the production of two new books. Work is a good distraction.

The summer passed and then the fall, and I was at last back into my old routine. But the higher rent not only meant that I would likely never get another winter off the streets, it meant as well that my savings would dwindle until I was no longer able to be a full-time writer.

Like an insidious cancer that is first removed by surgery and then waits to spring up anew elsewhere in the body, the lingering effects of Mrs. Ewing returned to haunt my dreams as well as my waking moments. I had been bullied. I had been demoralized, harassed, made physically sick, driven to the deepest depths of depression, and, above all, *defeated.* Her wrinkled face came out of the dark when I gazed at the ceiling at night. And I knew that behind my back she had blackened my name and reputation, telling all her neighbors about the horrible tenant -- an alleged writer but really just a no-good bum -- that she had gotten stuck with.

All my life, it seemed, I had been bullied, controlled, intimidated by creeps, scumbags, and authority figures who treated me as something less than human. A lifetime of bitterness now welled up in my throat. *They* were the subhuman ones, not I. The shits outnumber the real people, and the real people must not let themselves be pushed around. The phony God who lives in churches will never mete out justice. We must mete it out ourselves and exterminate the miscreants that would have us by the balls. Oh, to carry such a weight of anger in one's stomach! *Could I for once commit an act of self-assertion that would rid me of this anger, that would make up for all the injustices of a lifetime?*

Even in infertile soil the occasional seed may germinate. And so in the mind of one who had never committed an act of violence sprang the ugly weed of ineluctable revenge. I was tired of being told by others that my feelings were "inappropriate" or "unhealthy." I was tired of being advised to "yield the road to the enemy" and to "make allowances for those with diseased minds." And I was tired of being told that my problems were trivial and that I had no right to complain about anything unless I had had my legs cut off or starved for ten years in a dungeon.

And so one night, as the first winter wind howled through the cold steel-bitch thighs of the hookers across the street from my tiny attic apartment, I vowed that I would go back and murder Mrs. Ewing. Yes, enough months had passed that she might have forgotten about me completely

as she sat alone in her living room watching Tommy Hunter on TV through her thick glasses. All that would be required of me was to choose the right moment, for you see, dear reader, *I still had the key to the side door!* I had returned the key she had originally given me, but I had made a duplicate when I first moved in, which I used to carry in my wallet in the event I lost my key chain.

The best time would be around 4 a.m. She sometimes retired as late as two and might be up as late as three, but by four she would certainly be asleep. The whole street would be asleep.

I let my plan settle in my mind for 48 hours. I bought a large, sharp knife at a kitchenware boutique in one of the malls. The sales clerk didn't even bat an eye.

I chose a week night in December. There was no snow on the ground. I took the late-night Yonge St. bus uptown and then walked toward my old house, telling myself that if things did not look propitious, I would turn back. If the screen door were locked, I would have to give up my plan, for the idea was to make no noise, just get in quietly and do it. I knew that there would be no basement tenant since I'd left because Mrs. Ewing had vowed never to have a tenant again.

I will not attempt to put into the words the terrible excitement and anxiety that filled my pulsing blood as I approached the house. Nothing in my life could have prepared me for this. This, after all, was murder. I told myself that these signs of physical and emotional duress had to be mastered, just as a soldier must master his fears to face battle. And I told myself that if I succeeded in this act of revenge, *I would never have to prove myself in any other way as long as I lived.*

The few Christmas lights that had been left on overnight added only a little to the illumination from the streetlights. There was no moon because of an overcast, so the driveway was in darkness. I walked to the side door, my footsteps silenced by the rubbers I wore over my sneakers (the rubbers were for another purpose, however!), and with trembling hand reached for the handle of the screen door. It was unlocked. The screen door presented the greatest threat of noise and had to be opened slowly because of the pneumatic hinge. I opened it and guided my spare key into the door lock, as I had done on many a dark evening. The stairwell light was out, of course. A 40-watt bulb left on

overnight would cost almost two cents in electricity, and Mrs. Ewing was no spendthrift. I had anticipated this and brought a discreet little flashlight to help me navigate the stairs without lighting up the whole doorway.

In one more slow-motion minute I was in. Both doors were now closed behind me. I thought, *I am already a criminal! I have already committed a criminal act!* If Mrs. Ewing were to awaken suddenly, I would simply run out. Her eyesight was so bad she would never know who it was.

Reader, it was all too easy. And so in one moment I gained an insight that others take years to acquire: the mind is the main impediment to crime; crime itself is easy to commit.

I went up the stairs very slowly. I knew the door at the top of the stairs would be unlocked. I had to go down on my knees to open it because in my excitement I did not trust myself to stand.

Sticking my head in, I could hear the Old Bat snoring in her bed, sleeping the sleep of the dead. *I've come this far,* I thought. *I've actually made it this far without a hitch.* In my inside coat pocket I carried a little hammer -- a cute little hammer, that's all. Just enough to tap an old lady on the head. And with hammer in hand, I tiptoed into her room (I needn't have tiptoed but did anyway). For just a moment I felt a pang of guilt and pity for the poor old woman lying there in bed. I hesitated. And then her words came back to me: *"You bugger! You bastard! A bum that stands on the street trying to get money out of people!"* Yes, Mrs. Ewing, now the bum returns to collect an old debt And with a swat of the hammer upon the forehead, she was knocked out. Just a little gasp of air escaped her mouth, nothing more.

My object now was to drag the body into the little hall outside the bedroom, for by closing all the doors around the hall, I could turn on the hall light and be sure that no light would shine out of any window of the house.

I dragged the surprisingly heavy body into the hall, closed all the doors and turned on the light. How utterly banal this creature now looked, this...*person?...or thing?* ...that had almost destroyed my life. I took off my coat and put it on top of the laundry hamper and placed the knife on the floor, when all of a sudden she began to stir, moaning a bit. She was a strong woman, tough and mean despite

her age. What would I do now?

She made a gurgling sound as her eyes flickered open. I assumed she would be too disoriented to recognize me -- certainly not without her glasses. I stood over her, her mouth open and rigid, giving her face the absurd and pathetic look of a silent scream. Then she looked at me and said, "It's you! You...*bastard!*" And before she could cry for help, I pounced on her, my knees on her shoulders, and put my fingers around her throat.

"This is it....I'm back....Now you'll be...sorry," I said uncertainly. I would have liked to be more eloquent, but we are always more eloquent before or after the critical moment than during it. Well, that's life, isn't it? Seeing that she was unable to resist, I summoned all my will power for the fatal act. "You bitch! You're so fucking righteous, now you can go meet your God!" And I tightened my grip on her throat, which felt strangely greasy, like a wet fish. How long did I choke her? Thirty seconds? A minute? Two minutes? I can't say for sure. All I recall is that in the very midst of this act I could hear the voice of D.Y., an editor acquaintance of mine, saying to me, *"You know, you really have an attitude problem."* Perhaps it was so, but I was willing to admit it. The truly ill person is the one with no self-awareness. At any rate, I no longer cared what anyone thought of me. In the person of Mrs. Ewing I was strangling every despicable creature that had ever caused me to suffer. *Goodbye, Mrs. Ewing! Go to heaven or go to hell, I don't care which!* I thought as I looked into her ugly face until her eyes closed and all the tension went out of her muscles. Perhaps I'd been too quick or too slow about it, but what did it matter now? I sat back on the floor and took a deep breath. It was 4:30. By sunrise I intended to be home in bed, sipping sherry and watching *The Muppets*.

Now I had reached the bloody part. Why this was necessary, I can't say. I have thought about it many times since then but can offer you no clear explanation. Maybe it was just my obsession to take the act to its extreme. I'd had a very rough year, what else can I say? As I held the knife over her body, I thought of all the times I had imagined strangling her or pushing her down the stairs or simply not calling an ambulance when she took an accidental fall. I had not then imagined cutting her open and eating parts of her flesh. But once having resolved to kill her, I stood on a

new threshold of imagination, one might say. And now, having actually killed her, it seemed a shame to waste this opportunity for a memorable and soul-purging experience.

I hesitated out of squeamishness, as well as an uncertainty as to how to proceed. (This was a little like the time I first attempted to carve a duck.) Finally, mindful of the time, I got on with it. Exposing her torso, I put the knife in just below the throat (blood rushed out immediately, but my sneakers were in no danger of being stained by blood because of the rubbers I wore over them), all the while telling myself over and over, *She's dead, so she feels nothing.*

The initial incision revealed nothing of the organs because of all the blood. I now had to dig deeper, and I hoped that I could remember enough of my high school anatomy lessons to get through my gruesome work in a reasonable time.

My first objective was the heart, but to get at it, I had to go through the breastbone -- no easy task. As I dug under it to pry it loose, nausea threatened to overtake me, so as a mental trick I forced myself to recall passages from Shakespeare: *"The quality of mercy is not strained..."* (hack, hack...pull) *"It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven upon the place beneath..."* (hack...pull...crack) *"It is twice blest..."* And like a child clumsily cutting his meat by himself, I managed to expose the heart and cut off a little piece of ventricle -- such a sticky, veiny mass of disgusting flesh but probably no worse than what goes into some brands of salami. Steeling myself, I put the morsel to my mouth and chewed it tentatively. Reader, the heart of this fine Christian was sour-tasting and extremely tough. I was too revolted to swallow the piece and so spit it out.

I left the mangled heart and searched for the liver. The liver is the largest organ in the body and impossible to miss, although one has to go through the rib cage to get at it. I cut laterally between two ribs just below the diaphragm and then decided to section off part of one rib. I did not have the surgeon's benefit of suction to remove the obscuring blood and so made rather a mess of it, I'm afraid. When my stomach fluttered, I recited to myself: *"Out, damned spot! out, I say! One; two. Why then 'tis time to do't. Hell is murky. Fie, my lord, fie! a soldier, and afeard?"* With all the peculiar membranes and other little unidentifiable things adhering to it, it was hard to believe that this was a healthy

liver. But Mrs. Ewing didn't drink. *"What need we fear who knows it, when none can call our pow'r to accompt?"* And when I cut a little piece out of the liver and put it in my mouth, it was bitter with the taste of bile. I thought of Carter's Little Liver Pills (I never knew what they were for). I spit out the piece of liver.

Could anything counteract the bitter taste of the liver? Why, the sweetbreads, of course! *Yes, the good old thymus gland of a slaughtered animal carcass*...my mind was tripping off into the slaughterhouse of Canada Packers...*yes, sweetbreads ripped out of the throats of warm-blooded animals!* The thymus would be hiding beneath the breastbone, at the top of the heart. And returning to my previous incision, I mucked about until I found the shriveled old thymus, a gland which shrinks with advancing age. The upper torso was now a horrible mess. *"Is this a dagger which I see before me, the handle toward my hand? Come, let me clutch thee! I have thee not, and yet I see thee still."* And so I cut the poor little fellow out and chewed on it, expecting finally some hint of sweetness and goodness from this body. But I was repulsed by a rancid taste that made me think of a spoiled clam thrown into an alley among garbage cans and pissed on by a sick, insane dog. I spit out the thymus.

What else might I try? The lungs. Yes, the lungs were edible and no problem to get at. And so I made a lateral incision above the diaphragm, stuck the knife in to pry up part of the lung, and severed a slice of it. *"To be or not to be: that is the question: whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune..."* The piece of lung I chewed on had the bitter taste of tobacco tar, for Mrs. Ewing had been devoted to Craven A's. And as I chewed on it, the thought occurred to me that perhaps the cells were cancerous -- wouldn't that be a fine final revenge by Mrs. Ewing against me! -- and so I spit it out.

The gall bladder, pancreas, and spleen were out of the question. What else would be edible? The kidneys, certainly. Steak-and-kidney pie -- a favorite English dish. To get at the kidneys I had to turn her over and go through the back, approximately at the level of the lowest rib (otherwise I would've had to go through the colon or stomach, and I wasn't up for that!). To my surprise, I noticed a surgical scar, and, indeed, when I dug into her at that spot, I found that one kidney had been removed. So I had to go to the other

side, which was harder because the rib cage was intact. *"Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! rage! blow! You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout till you have drench'd our steeples, drown'd the cocks!"* The kidney was the ugliest organ of them all, full of bluish and reddish connecting tubes. I cut off a piece and tried it. The taste was indescribably awful -- nothing like cooked kidneys -- and there was a little stone in the piece, so I spit it out. Such a disappointment!

At least a plain old hunk of arm muscle should be palatable, no worse than a piece of raw steak. So with a simple cut, I removed a piece of flesh. It had a fatty texture, well marbled, and as I chewed on it, I thought, *"Virtue? a fig! 'Tis in ourselves that we are thus or thus. Our bodies are our gardens, to the which our wills are gardeners..."* (I forgot the next part and skipped ahead.) *"If the balance of our lives had not one scale of reason to poise another of sensuality, the blood and baseness of our natures would conduct us to most prepost'rous conclusions..."* The flesh had no taste whatever except for saltiness. Enough! I spit it out.

I got up and stepped delicately across the bloody floor and into the washroom, where I washed my hands and face without turning on the light. I'd be leaving behind a bloody mess but no prints. I'd be careful about that. I'd wipe the prints off everything I touched. I washed the blood off my knife. Then I removed the plastic liner from the waste basket so that I could put the stained rubbers in them and discard them on the way home.

I went back and looked at the mutilated body that had in life tormented me so, and I could not help but feel that it looked totally harmless in death. How had I ever allowed myself to be so bullied and intimidated by her?

I had a passing thought of cutting the head right off and kicking it around like a soccer ball, but I thought that would be going a tad too far.

I turned off the hall light and went down the stairs to the side door, whence I had come. I paused in the dark to remove my rubbers and put them in the plastic bag. Then I slowly opened the door and the screen door and let myself out. I did not lock the door behind me. Better to let the police assume that she had left it unlocked and been the victim of an intruder she didn't know. They would wonder long and hard about the condition of the body. Suspicion would never fall

on me. They would think it was a weird religious cult murder of some sort.

I wiped the doorknob with my hanky and walked down the driveway cautiously, pausing to make sure no one was out early walking a dog. All was quiet. The street was deserted.

I am triumphant! I am triumphant! I have cured myself of all psychic torment! I thought as I walked toward Yonge St. *Good does triumph over Evil! At least sometimes.*

Was it a cold morning? I don't remember. I was so flushed with excitement I was sweating despite the cold. I opened my coat and breathed deeply.

When I reached Yonge St., I put the bag with my bloody rubbers in a waste basket, where it would be picked up that same morning.

It was about 5:45, a bit too early for the subway. I didn't want to risk boarding a night bus or taking a cab. No, better to wait till the rush hour, then blend in with the crowd. And so to kill time I walked to a nearby park and sat on a bench. I felt intensely alive and loved every tree and every bird. And as if to satisfy my critics, I got up and skipped around like an idiot, thinking socially constructive thoughts: how to end poverty, ignorance, and war through nice stories, that sort of thing. And I would never again resort to stereotyping or superficiality either. No, I would be as trenchant as my critics. Indeed, if necessary, I would get right down into the same trench with them and not come up again until I had converted myself to their view of the world.

Fatigue finally began to overtake me, and I thought of my warm bed downtown and a glass of sherry in my stomach to make me drowsy. The time was now suitable, so I walked toward the subway. As I reached the street, I saw a little old lady walking in careful little steps with her coat collar up against the wind as she pulled a shopping cart on her way back from the 24-hour supermarket nearby. Probably up early to get cat food for little Binky and Puff, how sweet! And I went out of my way to cross her path at the corner and assist her across the street. "Allow me, madam," I said gallantly and with total sincerity, for she looked like such a sweet old lady, the sort of old lady who would never insult or disrupt the life of a tenant.

"Oh!" she replied with surprise. "Why, thank you, young man!" And so I pulled her little cart with my right hand while allowing her to take my left arm, and she kept saying,

"You're very kind" and "You're such a gentleman."

I wished her a pleasant day and fell in with the morning crowd going into the subway entrance. Soon my knife, flashlight, and little hammer would be back in their proper places again, like truants back from a little escapade. And I too would be back in my bed, watching *The Muppets* and contemplating a life devoted to innocence and beauty, and no one would know I had even been out.

THE POLECAT

From *Anomalies and Curiosities of Medicine*, by George M. Gould, M.D., and Walter L. Pyle, M.D. (1896):

The emotions are said to have a decided influence on the odor of an individual. Gambrini, quoted by Monin, mentions a young man, unfortunate in love and violently jealous, whose body exhaled a sickening, pernicious, and fetid odor....

Rayer speaks of a woman under his care at the Hôpital de la Charité affected with chronic peritonitis, who some time before her death exhaled a very decided odor of musk....

The disorders of the nervous system are said to be associated with peculiar odors. Févre says the odor of the sweat of lunatics resembles that of yellow deer or mice....Burrows declares that in the absence of further evidence he would not hesitate to pronounce a person insane if he could perceive certain associate odors....Hammond refers to three cases under his notice in which specific odors were the results of affections of the nervous system....In this connection he mentions a young woman who, when suffering from intense sick headache, exhaled an odor resembling that of Limburger cheese.

Barbier met a case of disordered innervation in a captain of infantry, the upper half of whose body was subject to such offensive perspiration that despite all treatment he had to finally resign his commission....

Certain animals, such as the musk-ox, civet-cat, and beaver, possess glands on their sexual organs that secrete materials having a very strong odor....

*

Before her sordid death, you could have found the Polecat almost any afternoon vending her jewelry on Yonge St. She was a chubby woman in her fifties with blond hair and a piggy face. Her beady little eyes and piggy little nostrils were ever alert to the bulge of a wallet and the smell of money. She loved money very much. Under her sweater she wore a cross so that God would bring her customers and keep away the invisible devils. The devils were everywhere. She knew

the Writer, who was a bad young man who sold evil books on the street, was surrounded by invisible devils, and if he stood too close to her, the devils would drive her customers away. She would approach the Writer and exclaim, "In the name of Jesus, get away from here! Don't bring your demons around here! I'm trying to make a living!...Oh, Holy Jesus, protect me from Satan!...I order you to go away in the name of Jesus!" And her nostrils would flare in a show of Christian grace, and beneath her tight pants her stink gland would swell and tremble and give off a foul odor. The Writer would either tell her to drop dead or else smile and say nothing, depending on his mood.

Every night the Polecat would pray to Jesus to strike the Writer dead, as the Lord had smitten the enemies of His people on so many occasions in the Bible. And when she didn't see the Writer for several days, she hoped that he had at last been crushed by a truck or killed by a fatal disease and dragged into Hell where he belonged. But the Writer had simply been selling his books elsewhere, and his choice of location on any given day had nothing to do with the proximity of the Polecat. She, however, was territorial, like many animals, and confined herself to one corner, which she considered to be "hers."

The Polecat's jewelry was cheap, shoddy, unimaginative stuff, which she purported to make herself, but most of it was bought wholesale in Chinatown. She had little talent for craftsmanship, unlike her sister.

The Polecat's sister resembled her but had an entirely different personality. She didn't mind if the Writer stood near her. In fact, she liked having the Writer around for a bit of company. She thought he was funny, and he would watch her stand for her while she went to the washroom.

From the sister the Writer learned that the Polecat had no friends other than like-minded religious crackpots and that the rest of the family would have little to do with her. Her husband had left her, her daughter had left home, and her niece (daughter of the third sister), whom she had taken care of briefly, couldn't stand her. "And you know something? Darleen undercuts my prices. She comes up here one day and says, 'Oh, what nice silver ringlets! How much do you charge for them?' And I says, 'Four for a dollar.' And then I find out from one of my regulars that Darleen is sell- them five for a dollar. Can you beat that?"

On an average day the Polecat would earn about $150. If she didn't earn at least $100, she was very upset. (The Writer was happy to make $30 in a day.) She would blame the Writer for bringing his invisible demons around to queer her business, even though sometimes she was so busy with customers when he arrived that she might not even notice him for some time.

Whenever business was slow she would chant under her breath, "Jesus, feed my sheep. Jesus, feed my sheep." And usually a customer would come along. She didn't really have any sheep, but it was a politer way of asking Jesus to bring her money.

At the end of the day the Polecat would pack up her jewelry, fold her table, and tote her stuff to her car in the parking lot. Sometimes a faint trail of slime would be left behind her, noticeable only to dogs and cats. "Jesus, feed my sheep. Thank you, Jesus. Praise Jesus," she would mutter, thinking of all the money she had made, and some poor confused dog would smell her and piss in the doorway of Winky's Hamburgers.

The Polecat lived in a neat little house with her two Doberman pinschers, Stuka and Messerschmidt. She loved them abnormally and would give them treats while saying, "Jesus loves you because I love you." And then the Polecat would take a bath, and the bath water would be foul and gray afterwards. Her stink gland, which could swell to the size of a softball, would gleam in the fluorescent light, and she would powder it with perfumed talcum powder.

Then she would call Stuka and Messerschmidt into her bedroom and get on her knees on the bed and show them her vulva. And the dogs would become excited at once and jump on the bed and mount her -- first one, then the other. She would utter porcine grunts as their slender dog dicks poked her frantically. Her nipples would harden, and she would drool on the sheets, and she thought how lucky she was to have such amiable dogs and that no one would ever find out. The dogs had been blessed by an evangelical minister, who agreed with her that they were God's consolation to her for her husband's abandonment. Stuka and Messerschmidt were better than her husband, in fact, because they always accepted her and didn't argue with her about religion. Her husband had also wanted to be sucked off, but she didn't go for that.

The penis's place was in the vagina, not the mouth, because God had so willed it.

At bedtime the Polecat would turn on the only TV program that was not evil -- "Miracles For Tomorrow," with the Reverend Emil Volcano (pronounced *vole-CAH-no*). The logo on the Reverend's desk was a picture of an erupting volcano with a golden cross sticking out of the top. His daughter, a Bible student in Arkansas, had designed it herself. She had been born with deformed arms but had succeeded in learning how to draw and paint, a miracle her father frequently referred to on his show and credited to God.

Tonight Reverend Volcano had as his guest Mr. Jean-Pierre Hallet, founder of The Pygmy Fund in Malibu, California. The Pygmy Fund was a religious and agricultural aid program operating in Zaire. Mr. Hallet was greeted with applause as he sat beside Reverend Volcano's desk. He looked into the camera with a practised manner, his brown toupee glistening under the studio lights.

"Welcome back, Jean-Pierre. I'm sure we're all very interested to hear the latest news about The Pygmy Fund."

"Well! Emil, there are just no words to describe the magnitude of our success...."

"Praise the Lord!" said the Polecat as she munched on some cookies.

"I can best sum it up by reading a letter I recently received from none other than the Chief of Beni, who has jurisdiction over the area where The Pygmy Fund operates. May I read it?"

"Please do," replied Rev. Volcano.

Hallet unfolded the letter and adjusted his glasses. Uplifting organ music began to play. *"Ahem....'Dear Mr. Hallet, I have the honor of expressing to you personally and officially my sincere appreciation and gratitude for the generous and constant aid that you have offered to our First Citizen brothers for a number of years with so much devotion...' He's referring to the Pygmies, of course...."*

"Halle-*braak*-lujah!" said the Polecat as she belched.

"'The quantities of hoes, machetes, axes, seeds, and medical care that you provided for them have up to now most effectively contributed to their survival and general well-being. I am also grateful to you for having introduced the winged bean in my Collectivité...' That means his territory.

'...With such an amazing success not only among the Pygmies but also among the other Zairians. Having myself tried to introduce new food crops in order to aid the population, I realize even more so the merits and difficulties of your efforts. I particularly appreciate the fact that you have chosen the garden of my residence in order to establish one of your model family plots for the Seeds of Hope....'"

"Thank you, Jesus!" exclaimed the Polecat, patting Stuka's head.

"'Realizing that your aid is not only important but costly, I thank the contributors of your organization and encourage them to be as generous as possible so that this highly philanthropic work can keep on with continued success. May you accept, Dear Mr. Hallet, the expression of my best sentiments.' Signed, Atshongia Mutombo Kasereka, President of the Popular Committee of Beni." The audience applauded loudly.

Rev. Volcano smiled with delight and shook his head slowly as if in awe. *"My, my, my!"* he said. *"It's just wonderful!"*

"Yes, isn't it?"

"And that chief writes such beautiful English!"

"Well, actually, the letter has been translated from Pygmy language."

"Oh, I see."

"Now, I want to say a few words about the importance of the winged bean, which your audience may not know too much about...."

The Polecat had as sharp an eye for Sin as she had for money. She could tell an evil man by the way he walked or even stood still. She once watched a man talking to a little girl, and she glared at him because he looked like a child molester. When the man escorted the girl across the street, holding her hand, the Polecat was tempted to run after him and demand to know what he was doing. Instead, she prayed to Jesus to protect the girl. (The man happened to be the girl's former teacher.)

Similarly, the Polecat knew that the Writer's books were evil. Only the Bible or books about Jesus could be good. Other books were of the Devil. Besides, the Writer's signs were practically admissions that his books were pornographic. *"Abnormal Bedtime Stories"*: she could just imagine what they

were about! The Polecat had never examined the Writer's books but nevertheless warned all her young female customers not to buy any books from "that man over there" because they were "dirty." Naturally, this caused all these girls to become intensely curious about the Writer and his books. One little girl stopped in front of him without saying a word and stared at the book he was holding. So the Writer asked her, "Were you interested in this?" The girl immediately went back to the Polecat and told her that "the man asked me if I was interested in his book." This caused the Polecat to leave her table and shout at the Writer, "YOU LEAVE THESE GIRLS ALONE, YOU PERVERT!" She then went to the nearest pay phone and called the police.

The next day two officers came by on routine foot patrol and stopped to speak to the Writer. "We've received a complaint that you've been selling pornography to children," said one of them.

"Really!" said the Writer. "Do tell."

"We have a witness," the officer continued.

"I wonder who," said the Writer, looking over at the Polecat, who was busy with a customer and was pretending not to see anything.

"Let me see this book," said the officer.

"Feel free. By all means," replied the Writer. "Find something pornographic in this book."

The officer flipped through the book and appeared to be puzzled by it, but he could find nothing remotely pornographic in it. He gave it back and took out his pad. "I'd like your name and date of birth anyway."

The Writer gave him the information and added, "I'm sure you've heard of me."

"I'm afraid not. Not meaning any disrespect, of course."

"It's okay."

The other cop remarked, "You sell your books on the street for a living?"

"Yes."

"Make much money?"

"Not really."

The cop chuckled. "Something new every day."

After they left, the Writer went up to the Polecat and said, "You're a very foolish woman. Here, look at my book and see if you can find something dirty in it." But the Polecat wouldn't look at it because she was afraid it was a

Devil's trick.

The Polecat's husband had left her five years before. He was not a religious man. He was just an average man with average vices, and he just wanted to hump his wife like any other married man. As he humped away, the Polecat, her eyes closed, would mutter, "Jesus! Jesus!" in ecstasy, which he found detrimental to his erection.

"Damn it, Darleen, why do you have to keep saying 'Jesus! Jesus!'" he complained.

"Sex is a gift of the Lord," she would reply testily. But the real reason she said "Jesus! Jesus!" was that she imagined it was Jesus fucking her, not her husband. Jesus was so handsome. He never drank or smoke or smelled, and He must have a very big penis. Only Jesus was worthy of her. She dreamed of going to Heaven and being Jesus' Queen and Girlfriend. All men were dirty and vulgar. She had only married Walter because she had been young and foolish and had been pushed into it by her mother. After a while -- that is to say, a while after she found Jesus -- Walter lost his interest and some of his sexual confidence. Eventually he took up with a nice, average woman on his own level who was happy to get laid and didn't mutter anything except "Fuck me, you brute!" and he left his wife. The Polecat was glad to be rid of him. She didn't need him. She could jerk herself off thinking of Jesus, and, of course, she had her dogs, her God-given companions.

As I said before, the Polecat loved money. It didn't matter where the money came from. If she saw a teenager wearing a satanic emblem, she would curse him silently, but if he stopped to buy something from her, she was extremely polite and took his money the same as anyone else's. It was even better to take the Devil's money.

She would count her money every night. She had over $100,000 in the bank, and her house was paid off. God was not only feeding her sheep, He was making them so fat they could hardly walk. Yet she gave nothing to anyone, not even a nickel to a beggar. She had dropped out of her church because it was too liberal and figured she was way ahead on donations. As for her income taxes, she was cheating Revenue Canada by under-reporting her income because they were doing the Devil's work. The less money the Devil got, the better

it was for Jesus. And for Darleen. She was doing the Lord's work by cheating on her income taxes.

One reason she hated the Writer was because he didn't have to buy a vendor's permit. She claimed to be paying $730 a year for her permit, and she told him he was "immoral" to be setting up any old place and vending without a permit.

The Polecat was so hard-nosed on this point of licensing that she called the police two days in a row to charge the Writer with illegal vending. The first time, the officer who responded spoke to the Polecat but only glanced at the Writer, whom he knew by sight, as did many of the officers in 52 Division. He got back in his car and left. The second day, a different officer arrived and asked the Writer what he was doing. The Writer explained politely that he was an author exercising his freedom of the press and that no license existed that pertained to him. He also told the officer that the Polecat had accused him of being a servant of the Devil.

The officer went over to the Polecat. "Did you call him a servant of the Devil?"

"Yes!" replied the Polecat proudly. Whereupon the officer went back to his car and drove off.

The Polecat, angry at her failure, shouted at the Writer, "You think you're very smart, don't you?"

"Score one for the Devil," he replied, teasing her.

"You can't fool Jesus! Jesus commands you to be gone, and take your invisible demons with you!"

The Writer promptly reached into his case and put on his most provocative sign -- *"Slimy, Disgusting Stories"* -- and wore it for the rest of the day. The Polecat was severely agitated, her stink gland buzzing with Christian indignation. Even the hairs in her nose bristled. And every customer who stopped at her table got an earful from her and would look over at the Writer and frown at him.

The Writer lit up his pipe, the wind blowing the smoke toward the Polecat.

"Don't stink up the place with that pipe!" she shouted at him.

"Why don't you ask God to make the wind blow the other way? I'm sure he'd do that much for you."

The Polecat prayed that the Writer would die of lung cancer and go to Hell.

Now, the Writer needed a spot where he could get a bit

of sun on cold days, and his preferred spot was in front of Winky's, about 40 feet away from the Polecat. But that was not far enough for her. "Go away in the name of the Lord! I command you to be gone in the name of the holy blood of the Lamb! Get lost! You're on private property!" screamed the Polecat, her stink gland humming with spiritual love beneath her pants. At that moment a man passed by walking a ferret, and, why, that ferret was so sure he smelled a cousin that he jumped like crazy and pulled at his leash so that the Polecat snapped at the man, "Get that rat away from me!"

"It ain't a rat, it's a ferret, lady."

"Well, get it away! I don't want that thing near me!"

"Keep your shirt on, lady. He's harmless....Okay, Millard, come on, the lady don't like you."

The Polecat was so upset she looked to see if the Writer had left yet. "Haven't you gone yet? I told you to leave! The manager doesn't want you here!"

"How do you know?" asked the Writer.

The Polecat prayed, "Jesus, Holy Jesus, I beg you to get him away from me! Sweet Jesus, my Lord, get that sinner away from me!" And her pants got somewhat moist from her oily secretions. Then a customer stopped to look at earrings, and she calmed down.

"I've had such a bad day," complained the Polecat to her dogs. And she offered up her fat pink ass, and the dogs got on her by turns and humped the hard day out of her. And as Messerschmidt's dick squirted its load into her, she had a vision of Jesus coming to her out of the clouds, so radiant, so handsome, and He had His arms held out to her. And in the distance was a double throne for Jesus and His intended Queen, Darleen. She would help Him rule over the Earth, and she would have a lot of power of her own, you betcha.

"We have a very special guest tonight," said Rev. Emil Volcano. *"A guest who personally experienced a miracle!..."*

"Pwaze Jeeza!" said the Polecat, her mouth full of Chips Ahoy cookies.

"Mrs. Maria Rubio, from Lake Arthur, New Mexico....Welcome, Mrs. Rubio!..." The somber, unattractive, middle-aged woman wearing a cheap floral dress took her place on the set. She did not smile, but she acknowledged Rev. Volcano's handshake with a little bow of Christian humility.

"Mrs. Rubio, you have a remarkable story to tell us and a photograph to back up your claim, don't you?"

"Yes. Thank you. It happened like this. I was rolling my husband's burrito, and on the last roll, I noticed something which looked like a face. I just stood there, not moving, because it looked like the face of Jesus...."

"Praise the Lord!" exclaimed the Polecat, looking momentarily for a Jesus-like visage on her Chips Ahoy cookie.

"So I called my daughter, Rosie. She just stared and said, 'That's Jesus!' Then I called my husband, Eduardo, and our neighbor, Mr. Mike Salmon, and they agreed it looked like Jesus. I felt chills all over my body, and I wanted to cry..."

"God is real!" exclaimed the Polecat, her eyes wet.

"Praise the Lord! So then what happened, Mrs. Rubio?"

"I took the tortilla to church the next day -- the Church of the Immaculate Conception. Father Finnigan blessed the tortilla for me, but he said maybe it was just a good accident. But I know it's no accident. Here is the picture. You can see for yourself." She held the picture up, and Rev. Volcano tilted it toward the camera. It looked like a semi-profile of a mutated sheep's head with a leg coming off its nose. *"See....There's the eyes, and the nose, and the mouth, and even the hair. See? You can see it very clear."*

"Oh, my! Isn't this the most wonderful testimony, ladies and gentlemen? This is *a miracle!"* said Rev. Volcano.

"People came from all over once they heard about it. There were thousands of them lined up outside the house. I let everyone come and look. I don't charge them anything. If they ask me to pray for them, I do. I am very patient. I don't turn anyone away."

"And how has this miracle changed your life?" asked Rev. Volcano.

"I am much more filled with love than before," replied Mrs. Rubio, frowning gravely. *"And a few days after the face appeared, I had a dream. I dreamed that Christ was standing there in a white robe, with clouds and mist billowing around Him. He told me He had come for me...."*

"What?" said the Polecat with alarm. "Jesus doesn't want *you*, you idiot!"

"But I said I wasn't ready to go, that I had more things to do on Earth. He kept calling to me, and I kept telling Him I wanted to stay and work with the people. Finally, my husband awakened me, and Christ was gone."

"I think you misunderstood Him, lady!" said the Polecat to the woman on TV. "He was just saying hello, that's all!"

Then the organ began to play, and Rev. Volcano paused to pray with Mrs. Rubio on the air -- that all sinners should find Jesus, that people of all races should live in peace, that the Devil should be prevented from taking over the government of the United States, especially the Federal Communications Commission -- and as they prayed together out loud, the mailing address and phone number of the program appeared on the screen along with an appeal for offerings.

The Polecat was deeply moved that Jesus would condescend to reveal Himself to a Catholic, just as He might to a cannibal or a Presbyterian. It was a nice gesture on His part.

The Polecat began her campaign to get the Writer kicked off of his spot in front of Winky's. This would take some doing because he was quiet and didn't actually do anything to annoy anyone going into or coming out of Winky's, and the management had thus far taken no notice of him. So first the Polecat got friendly with this young fellow who worked in Winky's and was born-again. He was a classic nerd. Every day the Polecat would fill this boy's head with derogatory talk about the Writer -- how he sold pornography, how he was several inches within Winky's property line, how his presence was bad for all concerned, etc. And the Polecat gave the boy a cheap bracelet as a gift for his mother and suggested he ought to tell the manager about the evil writer selling dirty books on their property. That was good enough for the boy. He could tell just by looking at the Writer out of the corner of his eye that everything she said was the truth.

To further ingratiate herself with Winky's, the Polecat offered to help pass out coupons for their current promotional campaign. Why, it would be no trouble at all. She was right at their corner and could hand out hundreds of coupons as easy as anything and bring them lots of business. Glad to do it. Glad to help Winky's.

The Writer saw this and figured what was coming. After all the Polecat's prodding and ingratiation, it was inevitable that someone would come out of Winky's and ask him to leave. It was a clean-cut assistant manager. "I'm afraid I have to ask you to leave," he said politely. "We don't allow vending within our property line."

"It's because of *her*, isn't it?" said the Writer, indi-

cating the Polecat, whose back was turned to them.

The assistant manager shrugged apologetically. "We just have a policy, that's all. I don't have anything against you personally."

Because the man was within his rights and because he was being polite, the Writer packed up like a good citizen and left, realizing that he would see very little sun for the rest of the winter. But he paused at the Polecat's table long enough to say, "Darleen, you are shit! You are the lowest scum of the earth!"

And the Polecat complained to her customer, "You see how I get persecuted out here?"

Well, the Writer thought he'd seen it all, but two days later, on his way down the street, there was the Polecat *occupying the very space she'd gotten him kicked off of!* And doing business like you wouldn't believe. Thoroughly pissed off, he went up to her and said, "You bloody hypocrite! You had me kicked out of here because it was private property, and now here *you* are, you slimy shit! I'll get even with you!"

His angry tone scared the Polecat momentarily, but then she collected her wits, glared back at him, and exclaimed, "Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord! Take it up with Him!"

The Writer went away thinking that no god worth anything would allow his name to be used by a scumbag like that as justification for her behavior.

The Polecat had a particularly good night with the dogs. She first rubbed their organs to get them excited and then took them one at a time. The dogs had especially powerful ejaculations and lay at the side of the bed, exhausted. She gave them some treats and got ready for Rev. Volcano's program, "Miracles For Tomorrow."

Tonight's guest was a fat black lady who had come to talk about Halley's Comet and Doomsday.

"It's really Jacob's Comet," she observed. *"The Bible says a star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel. Jacob was also named Israel. Since the comet comes out of Jacob, it belongs to Jacob. It should work for Jacob and be commanded by him."*

Rev. Volcano remarked, *"The appearance of Halley's Comet has always coincided with disasters, hasn't it?"*

"Yes, but in all cases it was the downfall of tyrants

and despots. The comet actually helps devout, God-fearing people by attacking the enemies of Jesus...."

"Praise Jesus! Jesus is coming!" said the Polecat.

"So by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ's name, we can command the stars to fight and order Jacob's Comet to point its tail towards all tyrants and to mop up all autocratic dynasties. Then the old world shall pass away and Jesus shall return!"

"Of course, the comet has already come and gone," said Rev. Volcano. *"And we're still here, heh, heh."*

"Well, the End of the World is a little later than I expected, but the ball has gotten rolling, that's for sure, and the End could come any day. I have a song I composed, which I'd like to sing. It's called 'Doomsday Is Near.'"

"All right, we have a piano all ready for you," said Rev. Volcano.

The black lady took her song sheet over to the piano and sat down. Without any introduction, she plunged in, banging the keys loudly as she sang the tuneless melody:

"The end of the world is near!
Com-et war-fare has be-gun!
Sa-tan's wiles through-out the age-s,
Shall be ut-ter-ly de-stroyed!
Ty-rants en-slave man-kind,
The trag-ic his-tory of men!
Christ re-veals ho-ly might-y arm,
Set-ting free all slaves of sins.

Com-et comes (comet comes) to de-stroy (to destroy)
King-dom of beast and ty-rants.
Christ the Lord (Christ the Lord) shall come soon
(shall come soon)
To build up Cos-mic Re-pub-lic!

The com-et comes from Ja-cob!
King a-ris-es from Is-rael.
He will kill lead-ers of Mo-ab,
De-stroy peo-ple of Se-ir!
Con-quer E-dom our foe,
Take pos-ses-sion of their land.
Tram-ple, de-stroy the sur-vi-vors,
Is-rael con-tin-ues trium-phant.

Com-et comes (comet comes) to de-stroy (to destroy)
King-dom of beast and ty-rants.
Christ the Lord (Christ the Lord) shall come soon
(shall come soon)
To build up Cos-mic Re-pub-lic!"

That night the Polecat had a disturbing dream. She dreamed that she was pregnant and that she was giving birth to a fetus with a dog's head. The dog looked just like one of her Dobermans.

In the morning she got up feeling nauseous. She went into the bathroom and threw up. She felt peculiar all over, just as she had when she had been pregnant. Something was very wrong here, she thought.

When she went out to do business, she prayed silently to Jesus to show her signs to let her know what was happening. She saw or heard the following things: two dogs copulating, a baby wearing a bunny cap with long ears, a punk girl with a satanic emblem on her jacket walking a dog, which she called "Baby," and a conversation between the Writer and one of his customers, in which dogs were referred to. The Writer had written something about dead dogs apparently. "Jesus, protect me from all Evil!" the Polecat chanted to herself all day long. Her stink gland ached, and she thought she felt something moving within her belly.

She packed up early and went home, where she took a leftover tranquilizer from an old prescription to calm down. By evening she felt better and decided she'd just gotten scared over nothing. The idea that she could have been impregnated by one of her dogs....Well, that was preposterous, wasn't it?

But that night the dogs would not come to her for some reason. They seemed totally uninterested, so that she had to have her visions of Jesus and His huge penis while working herself over with a large English cucumber.

A mild ache returned to her belly, so she took two aspirins and went to sleep with a large wood and copper cross on the affected area, praying for relief. In her sleep she had a terrifying nightmare. There was once again the fetus with a dog's head, squirming its way out of her vagina, and in front of her stood...the Devil himself, in all his horned grotesqueness! The Devil said, *"Darleen, our little darling is being born!"* And Darleen screamed and screamed but could

not wake herself up. Her hand grasped the cross on her belly, and she knew instinctively that she must destroy the Devil's offspring with it. And so she plunged the cross into her vagina, which caused her to awaken, but in the darkened room she became disoriented and thought she saw the Devil floating above her, and she knew not whether she was properly awake or still dreaming. In her panic, she fell off the bed with the cross still inside her, and the fall caused a tearing within her. Blood rushed out of her, and the dogs howled and jumped around her in confusion. She could think only of the phone, of dialing 911 for an ambulance, but her hand could not reach and she could not move her legs for all the pain. When she tried to pull the cross out of her, an uneven edge pierced her stink gland and ruptured it, which paralyzed her from the waist down. There she lay, the life leaking out of her, her cries of pain trapped within closed windows. Stuka and Messerschmidt licked her face in sympathy, and when she was finally motionless they licked her blood for the first time and found it much to their liking.

*

Woman's Body Found Eaten By Dogs

Toronto, Ont. (CP)--The body of a dead woman partially eaten by her two dogs was found yesterday in her home by the woman's sister, who had been unable to reach her by phone. Mary Ellen Murphy of Richmond Hill told police she became worried when her sister, Darleen Cumby, 52, of Mortimer Avenue, Toronto, did not answer her phone for a week. She said the sisters had been estranged for many years but always phoned each other on their birthdays. When Murphy went to her sister's home, she forced her way in through a window with the help of a neighbour. Inside, they found Cumby's partially eaten body. Police were called to the scene at once.

"Looks like the dogs ate her," Coroner Charles McIlveen said as he inspected the remains. He said an autopsy would be performed, but he did not expect to learn much because of the condition of the body.

Police believe Cumby died of natural causes and that the dogs were then forced to eat her for food. Neighbours said the dogs, two Doberman pinschers, were tame and well-behaved. A spokesman for the Ontario Humane Society said the Society had taken custody of the dogs for temporary observation.

WHO IS JOHN COPPING?

It was sometime in the spring of 1987 that I became aware of something peculiar happening around me. I kept hearing the name John Copping. I have probably forgotten where I heard this name the first couple of times, but after the third time, I believe, my subconscious nudged my conscious mind to start paying attention. It was outside the Eaton Centre. A girl remarked to her boyfriend, "It isn't yours, it's John Copping's." And the boyfriend replied, "I'll kill him!"

Now, I'm the first to admit that I can see or hear the name of a pop star a hundred times and forget it because I'm not interested. But hearing a name spoken on the street by strangers in different places and in different contexts is something else, and I could not help but become curious.

Outside A&A Records at Yonge and Gould, I heard one teenager remark to another, "John Copping sucks earthworms."

Later that same day, on Bathurst St., I heard a black woman scold her child: "Now, you gonna do yo' homework, Dwayne, o' else you gonna grow up stupid like dat John Copping!"

The next day I was passing by a sleazy dive and stopped momentarily to look at the posters of strippers when I heard the manager say to the bouncer in the doorway, "If that guy John Copping shows his face here again, you throw him out!" And the bouncer rubbed his right fist into his left palm and replied, "Right, boss!"

By now I was mystified and perhaps a little alarmed because the thought crossed my mind that someone was playing a joke on me. But I ruled this out because these people were all strangers. The question remained: who was John Copping?

I went into an adult bookstore to sell some of my old magazines, and just to be humorous, I asked the proprietor, "Do you have any of those enema magazines?"

"We did," he replied in a businesslike tone, "but John Copping bought them all. It'll be at least two weeks before we get our next shipment." I thanked him and left.

The next day I was walking along King St. There were two girls ahead of me wearing Concordia University jackets.

One of them said to the other, "You know what I heard about John Copping?"

"No, what?" replied her friend.

"I heard he has a loathsome disease."

"Oh," said her friend, chewing her bubble gum noisily. "What's 'loathsome' mean?"

The first girl replied, "I think it means, like, sorta yucky."

"Oh," said the other. "Like, what's he got?"

"Well, they say he's got--" At this point a streetcar rumbled by, drowning out the girl's voice for a few seconds. "...And they're all over his chest and back."

"Ugh!" said the other girl. Then they went into a bank, and that was the last thing I heard. I was sorely tempted to wait for them and then ask them point-blank, "Who the hell is John Copping?" But I am a reticent man by nature and believe that people like to be left alone when discussing personal matters.

Later, I was in the men's room of a shopping mall. On the wall over the urinal was a crudely drawn picture of a man with a head shaped like a penis. On the man's chest was the name 'John Copping.' I thought whoever this John Copping is, people don't like him.

This proved to be a premature deduction, however, because on Queen St. I overheard two winos in an alley drink a toast to John Copping. And a demented bag lady who smelled of urine declared her love for John Copping to a rusty washing machine lying on its side in a vacant, litter-strewn lot.

I thought I'd finally latched onto a solid clue when I saw a poster on a wooden fence advertising an "Industrial Film Festival" at the Hydro Building. I spotted the words "*The Epic Saga of Linoleum*. Written by Flarko Smarbellog. Film score by John Copping." Unfortunately, the poster was six months old.

I was beginning to lose sleep. I had tortured dreams in which I pursued a faceless man or in which he pursued me. I awoke one night around 4 a.m. in a cold sweat and decided to end this distraction by looking up John Copping in the phone book and calling him up at once. Alas, there was no listing for such a name. "Will this never end?" I moaned and went back to bed with the aid of a large glass of strong sherry.

A day or two later found me at Nathan Phillips Square. I was eating an ice cream cone purchased from a truck. I

then noticed two well-dressed gentlemen sitting nearby, well within earshot. They were eating hot dogs. I recognized the stout one as the famous criminal lawyer Ed Greenspan. I heard him say, "As you know, Clay, I'm categorically opposed to capital punishment...." And when I looked at the other man, I saw that it was none other than Clayton Ruby, another famous criminal lawyer. *"With one exception,"* Greenspan continued.

"What's that?" asked Ruby.

"John Copping!" said Greenspan vehemently. "He should be put to death!"

Ruby nodded and wiped a bit of mustard from his lips.

I got up and left. I was unable to finish my ice cream cone and tossed it in a waste basket.

That same day I was passing a martial arts school not far from where I live. The front door was open because it was a warm day, and I paused to look in and watch the students practising. The instructor was apparently trying to encourage a timid student to smash a large brick with his fist. He said, "Look, Chan. Pretend you're smashing John Copping's head in."

At this, a look of sheer hatred passed across the student's face, and the hopelessly stereotyped yellow-belly raised his fist, his slant eyes burning with fury, shouted, "EEEEEE-YAH!" and smashed the brick into two neat halves. The other students clapped their approval.

A block away from the martial arts school, I ducked into McDonald's for a bite to eat. At the table beside me sat a priest and a doctor. (I knew the doctor was a doctor because the priest addressed him as such.) "Confidentially, Doctor," the priest began, "John Copping confessed to me that he..." And here he leaned forward and whispered.

"Ha! Ha! That's rich!" replied the doctor. "Well, let me tell you something about him...confidentially, of course." And the two men leaned their heads together, and once again I was left in the dark.

"Tsk! Tsk! My lord!" said the priest. "I don't know which is worse!"

I left McDonald's and went to the supermarket. I really wasn't in the mood to buy groceries, but supermarkets have a soothing effect on me. I look at everything and feel distracted in a nice way. Well, the bananas looked ripe. I thought I would buy some. And after picking a few, I hap-

pened to pause in front of the swinging door of the meat-cutting room. And as God is my witness, there on the wall I saw this sign posted in big letters:

SAVE TAINTED MEAT
FOR JOHN COPPING

I put the bananas back and walked out.

I slept little that night, despite my sherry and a tranquilizer. I thought I would go mad if I did not find the answer to this mystery.

The answer came soon enough when the next day I bumped into my writer friend Joe, who was coming out of a bookstore. He remarked that I didn't look well. I replied that I would never get a good night's sleep until I found out something. "You'd think it was quite silly, so don't ask," I said, really hoping that he would ask and then express some sympathy.

"Go ahead, tell me," he offered, good friend and confidant that he was.

"Well..." I began with a deep breath. "Everywhere I go, I seem to hear a particular person's name mentioned, and I've no idea who he is. I wouldn't expect you to know, but...*does the name John Copping mean anything to you?*"

Joe cocked his head and smiled at me as if I were quite the uninformed blockhead. At last he said blandly, "Why, yes, I know who John Copping is."

"You do? Tell me!"

Joe rummaged around in his satchel for a moment, pulled out a local literary tabloid that I rarely read, opened it, and thrust it under my nose. "John Copping is the person who wrote *this!*"

INCURABLE TRUCKS AND SPEEDING DISEASES
FOUL PUS FROM DEAD DOGS
SIMPLE STORIES FOR IDIOTS
Crad Kilodney
Charnel House, 1986.

These three latest volumes from Crad Kilodney show an admirable flair for originality. To be sure convention is thrown to the wind when one buys a book on the street directly from its author, printer and publisher. It sounds like a fine joke made at the expense of those stodgy CanLit types. But the gag falls flat when the material has so much trouble living up to its inventive presentation.

The first thing the reader will notice about *Incurable Trucks and Speeding Diseases* is its relentlessly snarky and cynical tone, unmatched even by Kafka at his Penal Colony-whiniest. These short-short stories seem to have cruelty and ignorance

as universal themes, and are populated by an endlessly interchangeable cast of perpetrators and victims. The rest makes up Mr. Kiodney's unwholesome leitmotif: junior-high scatology, irritatingly pointed sexist characterizations and racist asides, near-continuous gratuitous violence, and miscreant gibes at the Canada Council. The next thing that becomes apparent is the lack of sincerity with which the author has assembled his work. The ubiquitous references to and scenes of sex and violence are crudely drawn so beyond the pale of realism they verge on banality; there is the slight stink of second-hand feeling and borrowed experience. The seamy scenes favoured here spring not from any actual gutter, but from the suburban rec-room, lit by the glow of late night television, or littered with pornographic magazines. Characters appear to have been created for the purpose of moving the nasty stories from one place to another, but lack the dimension sufficient to have any nastiness of their own. Plot has been ousted by plot device, so that each story seems to rush headlong to its conclusion, where it invariably scores a teensy ironic punchline. So in the opening story, "Hot Line," a distress centre staffer talks an unfortunate caller to death. The caller's suicide is noted with the one word sentence "BLAM!" the response to which is "Oh, shit!" This is not a sensitive universe.

The trend continues in *Simple Stories for Idiots*, dedicated to a world growing "stupider and stupider, thanks to TV, the public school system and immigration"; A solemn east-west spy trade turns into a scuffle; a black African cartoon character makes it big in Toronto high society, marries the Princess of Wales, then aw-shucks it back to the jungle for the simple life. In the final story "Big Tits," a hopelessly stereotyped Italian male undergoes a mysterious shift of gender. The story's resolution:

> For Evita, however, there was still a problem. She still had the macho, masculine mind of Vito. The only solution, therefore, was for Evita to become a Lesbian.

The logic of this statement could have come from just about anywhere, but its origin at the rear of the class is strongly suggested by the inexplicable transformation of "lesbian" into a proper noun.

The writer seems more at ease with the long form in *Foul Pus from Dead Dogs*. This story, filling a single volume, has the employees of the Ontario Film Censor Board knocked off by a non-specific malady picked up from a dead dog left on the Board's front steps, involving plenty of blood and pus. For the sake of formality the central character is Mary Brown, (former) chairman of the Censor Board, who is not described so much as outlined. She dutifully tries to hold things together while pustules multiply around the office until, like a knee-jerk distillation of Hamlet, everybody dies.

Close analysis of *Foul Pus from Dead Dogs* presents the reader with a problem that arises in all of Mr. Kilodney's works. In many stories the pus, the dog, even the fabulously ordinary people who work at Mr. Kilodney's rendering of the Censor Board might be whipped into some wonderful frenzy of metaphoric meaningfulness. But all this venom is aimed at nothing, castigates no one in particular and satirizes no identifiable subject. Like a black-hatted figure that appears at the beginning and end of the story, or the bloody bible excerpts Mary Brown reads before bedtime, the author's prose insists on being taken at face value because it relates to nothing. Which doesn't give an audience much to work with, especially if they are as stupid as the author hopes. This is also true of the short stories in the other volumes. While it may be his strict intention, these are in every sense stories without morals.

With this in mind it becomes very difficult to know exactly how Mr. Kilodney's work is to be approached, or exactly what point it is that he is so strenuously trying to make. It's possible that a desire to be unusual or weird had undermined all other aspects of the author's creative impulses, leaving an almost random assemblage of words and sentences whose technical integrity, literary value and relevance are all questionable. If this is the case his writing is not remotely classifiable in the final view except, implicitly, as a bitter complaint against society.

The singularly arbitrary and mean-spirited tone leave it somewhere in stylistic limbo, a bizarre hybrid of comic book and hate literature, or an oblique parody of something the author was never able to identify or understand.

It is here that the reader must stop and look back up the street, and wonder if he really has taken part in a bold new experiment in street-level art culture, or if that guy was standing back

there in the snow selling his books because he *has* to. Because, as the introduction to *Incurable Trucks and Speeding Diseases* peevishly suggests, no one else is willing to publish or support his work. Because, artistically at least, Crad Kilodney has nowhere else to go. At which point self-expression runs a high risk of turning into self-indulgence.

John Copping

Also by Crad Kilodney

Mental Cases (Lowlands Review, 1978)
World Under Anaesthesia (Charnel House, 1979)
Gainfully Employed In Limbo (Charnel House, 1980)
Lightning Struck My Dick (Virgo Press, 1980)
Human Secrets -- Book One (Charnel House, 1981)
Human Secrets -- Book Two (Charnel House, 1982)
Sex Slaves of the Astro-Mutants (Charnel House, 1982)
Terminal Ward (Charnel House, 1983)
Pork College (Coach House Press, 1984)
Bang Heads Here, Suffering Bastards (Charnel House, 1984)
The Orange Book (Charnel House, 1984)
The Blue Book (Charnel House, 1985)
The Green Book (Charnel House, 1985)
The Scarlet Book (Charnel House, 1985)
The Yellow Book (Charnel House, 1985)
Cathy (Charnel House, 1985)
Foul Pus From Dead Dogs (Charnel House, 1986)
Incurable Trucks & Speeding Diseases (Charnel House, 1986)
Simple Stories For Idiots (Charnel House, 1986)
Nice Stories For Canadians (Charnel House, 1988)
Malignant Humors (Black Moss Press, 1988)

Edited by Crad Kilodney

Worst Canadian Stories, Vol. 1 (Charnel House, 1987)
Worst Canadian Stories, Vol. 2 (Charnel House, 1987)

About The Author

Crad Kilodney was born in the Borough of Queens, New York City, in 1948 and moved to Canada in 1973. He is probably the only writer in the world who sells his own books on the street as his sole occupation. He has been doing this in Toronto since 1978 (most winters included). His writing has also appeared in over 70 magazines, newspapers, and anthologies in Canada, the U.S., and Great Britain. He was the first writer to ever have an unsolicited short story accepted by *The National Lampoon*.

During all the years he has been on the street, the author has had every application for a grant rejected by the Canada Council. He was also rejected for the Canada Council's public reading programme. All his submissions to the C.B.C. Radio Literary Competition have been sent back by the preliminary reader. A draft manuscript based on his life on the street was submitted to the Ontario Arts Council for a work-in-progress grant and was rejected. He has never appeared in a major Canadian story anthology. His private editions have never been reviewed in any newspaper in Canada.

Every book the author has ever written has sold out its print run and gone on to become a collector's item.

This is Crad Kilodney's twelfth book on the subject of bowling. The first eleven were widely enjoyed by young and old alike, so he has written this one to keep up with the steady demand.

In this volume Mr. Kilodney tells how to select a bowling ball, how to convert difficult splits, and how to find a good psychiatrist. Interesting recipes involving lesser-known parts of the animal carcass are also given.

No aspect of bowling is left untouched -- history, semantics, crime, health, physics, and even funny jokes. There's something for every bowler, from the mild-mannered plant-eater to the savage flesh-eater. The author's refreshing, offbeat style makes his subject come alive, like a warm corpse reanimated by electricity.

Now, let's...GO BOWLING WITH CRAD KILODNEY!!!

Comments From People On The Street:

"Your writing is not only unhealthy for yourself but also for society." -- *Doctoral candidate in mathematics with a head shaped like a cube.*

"It's rather boring." -- *Man with a head shaped like an unshelled peanut.*

"This is not the way to go about being a writer." -- *Malcolm Dean, extremely famous author.*

"I hope you freeze to death." -- *Well-dressed lady on Bay St.*

"You are contributing to evil." -- *Guy carrying a book by Wittgenstein under his arm.*

"You're my favorite Canadian writer." -- *Pete K., 16, student.*

CHARNEL HOUSE
ISBN 0-920973-08-6